**Minutes of the Executive Committee**

**4th September 2020**

**Venue: Virtual Meeting**

**SDCT Website:** [**www.cipfa.org/partners/society-of-district-council-treasurers**](http://www.cipfa.org/partners/society-of-district-council-treasurers)

**Part A – Public Meeting**

**In Attendance:** Simone Hines (President), Mark Dickenson (VP), Angela George (Secretary), Alan Peach, Terry Collier, David Stanley, Ka Ng, Helen Smith, Adrian Rowbotham, Alison Scott, Glenn Hammons, Clare Fletcher, Steve Hearse, David Heyes, Simon Freeman .

**Also:** Bevis Ingram (LGA), Paul Dossett (GT), Aileen Murphie (NAO), Andrew Chappell (PSAA), Rob Baxter (Link),

1. **NAO Update – Aileen Murphie**

Aileen Murphie offered apologies from Mike Newbury who is the new NAO Director of Local Audit Code and Guidance Team, taking over from David Aldous who retired recently. Mike will attend a future meeting of the SDCT.

The Redmond Review audit report is due on 8th September and it remains to be seen what recommendations are made and how quickly they can be enacted.

Aileen also gave an update on the PAC Recommendation on Commercial Investments and on a new study the NAO are conducting on LG Finance and the Pandemic. A separate meeting will be arranged with the NAO to focus on this study; further information will be circulated.

**Action – Simone to suggest suitable dates to meet with the NAO.**

1. **Apologies**: Sal Khan, Peter Catchpole, Peter Stuart, Homira Javadi, Jenny Poole.

**Goodbye:** Steve Hearse and Paul Deal – the Executive recorded their thanks for the contribution made to the work of the Executive from Steve and Paul, and congratulated Steve on his promotion to Chief Executive.

**Welcome:** The Executive welcomed David Heyes, Torridge DC, to his first meeting.

1. **Minutes of Previous Meetings and matters arising**

The minutes of the previous meeting of 26th June 2020 were agreed. Any matters arising are either considered below or further on the agenda:

* 1. **PWLB Consultation response**

The SDCT submission to the consultation was made by 31st July deadline by Alison Scott. No further word on the review has been received yet.

1. **Update on COVID-19**
   1. **General Update**

Simone updated the meeting on the key issues arising from her regular meetings with MHCLG / LGA / ALATS etc. and the Executive discussed the key issues. There are still several unanswered questions around funding, particularly for Leisure and the HRA, and Sales Fees and Charges.

**Action – Simone**

1. **Spending Review 2020**

The LGA have been running a series of Roundtable discussions to feed into the Spending Review:

* Covid Scarring – 26th August (Clare Fletcher)
* Health Inequality - 11th September (Helen Smith)
* Children’s Services – 18th September (Mark Dickenson)

Bevis reported that MHCLG understand the timescale issues for LA’s but there has already been a suggestion that the Spending Review announcement might be ‘late’. Clare had requested at the roundtable she attended that if there were any parts of the settlement that could be released in a timelier manner then that would be useful.

Bevis reported that the LGA submission was already a lengthy document and that it was not finished yet.

Any further work on Business Rates Retention would be put off until the review into Business Rates is concluded.

The deadline for submissions is 24th September and the Executive would further consider the SDCT response in Part B of the agenda.

1. **Audit Issues**
   1. **PSAA Update**

Steve Hearse outlined the concerns the Executive have over very material fee increases without apparent justification. This has been an issue for several authorities for some time now. Andrew Chappell (PSAA) gave an update on the procedure for approving fee increases and gave assurances that the issue was being pursued with one of the Audit firms in particular. He reiterated that it is for PSAA to approve any fee increase requests and it is not the decision of the Audit firms.

Steve also queried the additional resources that would be required to meet the new VFM and Resilience Audit issues, and the impact this would have on fees.

Paul Dossett (GT) stated that he was hopeful that a combination of the Redmond Review recommendations (which were due to be published on 8th September) and the new Code, would enable Audit firms to refocus on what was important and move away from the current ‘FRC’ focus. He said that GT are in the process of recruiting more auditors as it will require more resources. He also advised that auditing in the wake of the Covid crisis was proving 25% more time consuming than normal.

Ka will be taking over the lead on Audit issues as this was Steve’s last meeting and Mark will provide back-up.

**Action – Ka and Mark**

1. **External Advisors / Sponsors**

The LGA, Link Group and GT gave a brief update on other areas of interest to the Executive.

1. **Any other Business**
   1. A query was raised on S31 Grants
   2. SDCT stance on LGR – to be discussed further.

**PART B Private Executive Business**

1. **Issues arising from Part A discussion**
   1. **Proposed studies for Covid 19 and Spending Review Submission**

Rob Turner (GT) outlined a proposal to undertake a study for **D**istricts – Covid19 Vulnerability and Recover Index. The index would be developed for all 188 District Councils and will provide individual data for each individual Council. Following discussion, the Executive approved the study which will commence on 7th September and conclude on 17th September in time to feed into the SDCT submission into the Spending Review 2020. A further meeting of the Executive / SDCT will be arranged after the report is received on 17th to discuss the output.

**Action – Simone to sign the contract. A meeting with GT has subsequently been agreed for 12 noon on 18th September.**

* 1. **LGFutures**

It was agreed that a re-run of the previous work that LGFutures carried out for the SDCT would be considered following the October Delta returns.

**Action – Simone to pursue**

* 1. **SDCT Spending Review Submission**

Simone and Mark will take the lead on the overall submission but asked for volunteers to lead on various aspect, particularly Homelessness, Planning, and the Commercial aspects.

**Simone / Mark to co-ordinate completion of the response to meet the submission deadline.**

* 1. **Local Government Re-organisation**

Simone will pull together some suggested words for the SDCT position on LGR to be discussed by SDCT. It was considered that this might follow the DCN stance – i.e. this was not the right time to add LGR to an already overloaded agenda for Councils who were struggling to deal with Covid19 recovery.

**Action – Simone**

1. **Executive Business:**
   1. **SDCT Constitution Amendments**

The proposed changes to the SDCT constitution (previously circulated) to set out contractual arrangements were agreed.

**Action – Angela to post on website**

* 1. **Member Issues**

The SDCT advisor areas will be updated following recent changes. Several vacancies to the Executive now exist (although 3 expression of interest forms are outstanding, and these will be chased). The SDCT workload is currently high and further assistance is required from new members.

**Action – SDCT Executive to identify further members**

* 1. **CIPFA Conference 2020**

The CIPFA Conference SDCT workshop has been cancelled as the CIPFA Conference is now a virtual one. CIPFA have offered SDCT assistance with a webinar on a different date and the Executive considered November might be an appropriate time to hold it.

**Action – To be considered further at a future meeting**

1. **Dates of Next Meetings - (all virtual)**

* A special meeting to the discuss the Redmond Review has been arranged for **9.30am on 11th September**. Sir Tony will join the meeting at 10am.
* A special meeting to discuss the GT report has been agreed for **12 noon on 18th September**.
* The next scheduled meeting is **10am on 16th October (Private meeting of the Executive).**

**It was noted that CIPFA have confirmed that their offices in London will remain closed for the rest of 2020 and so the SDCT meetings scheduled to be held at Mansell Street have been cancelled, including the AGM scheduled for January 2021. SDCT meetings will therefore remain virtual for the foreseeable future although a ‘face to face’ might be attempted at some point (albeit probably not in London)**